1993

Regulating school discipline problems: An evaluation of the Carnarvon Primary School discipline policy: Final research report

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Final Research Report

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ISBN: 0-7298-0163-2
December 1993

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
PERTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

REGULATING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS: An Evaluation of the Carnarvon Primary School Discipline Policy

FINAL RESEARCH REPORT
(DECEMBER, 1993)

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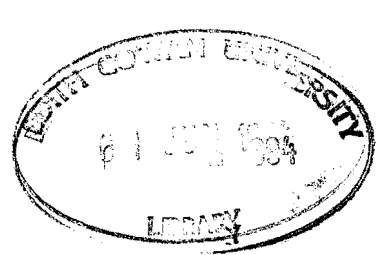


ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project owes a lot to a number of individuals and groups.

Mrs Marie Christie was perceptive enough, almost at first sight or with very little aid, to see that the Carnarvon Primary School where her son was the Principal would benefit from a contact with me.

Mr Len Christie, in his professional capacity as the Principal of the Carnarvon Primary School, had a large heart to seek to reclaim a violence-infested school and to invite an external evaluation. Together with his lovely family, Len made my research visits to Carnarvon comfortable and productive.

The Research Committee of the Arts Faculty of Edith Cowan University (ECU) was persuaded to support my application for grant, in a tight context of many other requests for funding.

The Youth Association of Gascoyne/Carnarvon supported the project with some funds and organised a community forum at which I presented the findings of this research and discussed critical issues in schools-community partnership for juvenile crime prevention.

The staff, students and parents of the Carnarvon Primary School were extremely receptive to the research objectives and demands for information. Their friendship was a key factor in the successful conduct of the research.

My colleague, Dr Quentin Beresford in Government Studies (ECU), with whom I have increasingly developed a research partnership was generous to me with his materials.

Ms Louise Swain, Mr John Horwitt, and others in the Education Department received me well and assisted me with useful materials.

Lastly, but by no means the least, my family gave me enormous moral and spiritual support.

Thank you to all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES:

FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of research focus

Schools in Australia and their surrounding communities have become gravely concerned about student behaviour problems. It is now commonly perceived that the violent component of this behaviour is on the increase. In one study, Omaji (1992a) showed that it is unwise for governments not to pay constructive attention to such perception and, also, that research and schools themselves have a critical role to play in dealing with student violence. In another study Omaji (1993) showed that options that schools have for managing or preventing the discipline problems or violence range from discipline policy, through pastoral counselling to the development of school curricula that promote non-violent attitudes.

Some schools in Western Australia have recently developed structured responses to student disruptive and violent behaviours. The Carnarvon Primary School (hereinafter, CPS), for instance, put in place a written and structured discipline policy since the beginning of 1993. Now, every policy response to a social problem such as the policy in question involves mobilising scarce resources towards definite expected outcomes. Further, achieving the policy objectives is mediated by critical issues such as corporate understanding and acceptance of the policy, clarity of the rules into which the policy is translated, and effective implementation process.

The administration in CPS recognised how important these issues could be and invited an external evaluation to highlight the critical operational attributes of their policy. The research upon which this report is based was a response to that invitation. It aimed to:

a assess the scope and suitability of the policy objectives;

b analyse the effectiveness of the process of implementing the policy; and

c provide a report on the impact of the policy to date.

Research plan, methods and techniques

Plan

As a regulatory response to the student indiscipline, the 'Carnarvon policy', like any public law, would reflect the values of its designers, the way the administration perceived the mischief to be cured, and the community consensus towards the policy. This evaluative research attempted to probe these underlying issues. Three visits to the CPS were planned and executed between August and December 1993. The first two were used to collect data and to give the host community a seminar; the third was to follow up on outstanding issues, including consultation with individuals and groups within the community, and to present the findings to the staff of the CPS.

Methods and techniques

There are five main models of evaluation: cost-analysis, experimental, goal-oriented, participatory, and process evaluation models. Only the process evaluation model was used for the research. Unlike the cost-analysis model which seeks to guide initial choices between alternative or competing

programs, 'process' model scrutinises the management cycle of programs already in operation such as the 'Carnarvon policy'. The model concentrates on analysing the process of developing and implementing programs and on monitoring changes associated with such programs, as opposed to experimental and goal-oriented models which address causal relationship and goal-attainment, respectively. Also, process model favours external or objective assessment of how parties are involved in designing and implementing the program, unlike the participatory model which allows only an in-house evaluation. Underwood's (1990) *Models of Evaluation in the Criminal Justice System* and Omaji's (1992b) "Evaluation in Violence Prevention: A Plain and Practical Approach" provide useful details about these models.

This research applied the process evaluation model to assess the management of change within the Carnarvon Primary School and its wider community, particularly with regard to student misbehaviour. That is to say, apart from scrutinising how the policy was developed and operated, the method was designed to enhance the awareness of the staff, students, parents and community leaders regarding the problem of student indiscipline and the various strategies to deal with it. Most of the respondents confirmed that the research contributed immensely to the awareness about the discipline problems to which the school devised a structured regulatory response.

File or document review, content analysis technique, and interviews are the strong research instruments in process evaluation model. These techniques were used to ascertain the scope of the policy objectives and their suitability

within a broad context of the school's experience, the Ministry of Education regulation, the expectations of the host community, and the existing literature. A reasonably effective system of documenting incidence of deviance in CPS facilitated the file-based mode of collecting the relevant data. A randomly selected sample of 50 respondents including the staff, students and parents was interviewed about the awareness of the policy, its formulation process, its operation and the changes that CPS has witnessed to date. Twenty respondents were interviewed using a structured schedule while the remaining thirty provided useful information on an impromptu and less structured basis. Usually people who implement a program find evaluative research threatening and become less forthcoming with information. CPS staff and students were an exception to this general rule as all the respondents were quite willing and generous with their views.

The two techniques of document search and survey yielded an enormous amount of information to permit a comprehensive analysis of how the policy was introduced to the school community, how acceptable it was to this community, how effective the implementation procedures were, and how the school climate changed following the introduction of the policy at the beginning of 1993.

Significance

This research was designed to contribute to the CPS effort to assess the efficacy of the policy, the rationale being that every social program has to have "a demonstrable impact to [justify] its implementation and continuation" (Omaji, 1992b). Equally significant was the prospect that the consequences of the research would extend beyond Carnarvon. It was

expected that the research would promote in its own way the much needed "culture of evaluation" in violence preventive programs in schools (Omaji, 1992c); and that it would serve as a stepping stone for broader collaborative research into national and regional prevention or regulation of school violence, with Edith Cowan University playing a major role.

Differences in the style of school administration, including record keeping and community relations, would affect the extent to which the findings from one school can be applicable to other schools. Nonetheless, with necessary adjustment, the findings of this research could be a useful material for the evaluation of behaviour management projects in other schools.

Before this final report was prepared, the author gave a seminar to the Carnarvon community on the findings of the evaluation. This was in the context of an address on schools-community partnership for preventing juvenile crime. Apart from further publicising the "war against indiscipline" in CPS, the forum became an opportunity for the community to discuss programs for the youth, supplementary education for children isolated from schools, and other issues that were germane to the prevention of school-related juvenile crime.

CHAPTER TWO

CPS DISCIPLINE POLICY: DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND SCOPE

Basic information about CPS

CPS opened on its present site around 1965 and has evolved into a Class 5 primary school, with two on-site full-time pre-primary centres, 12 classrooms, a music room, Library Resource Centre and canteen. The school has been, for some years, designated a priority school because it is located in one of the most disadvantaged communities in Western Australia (judging by the Australian Bureau of Statistics social profile data). According to a draft 'Guidelines for Operation' of the Priority Schools Program, "[priority school] program is designed to assist those schools serving communities with the greatest degree and concentration of socio-economic disadvantage. These are communities where some families are locked into a cycle of poverty and poor educational attainment" (p2).

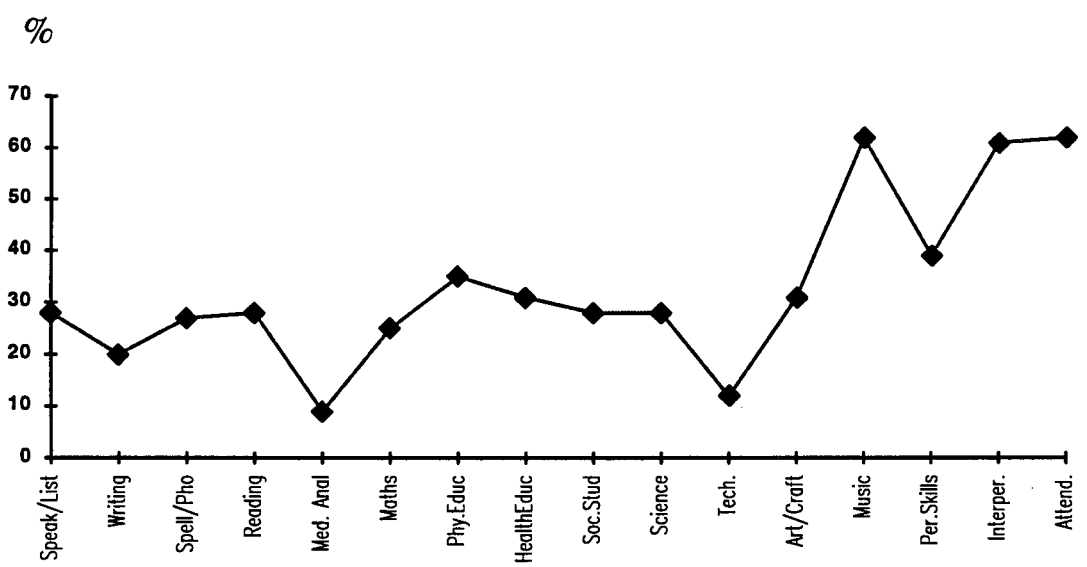
Student enrolments in a five year period, from 1989-1993, averaged about 340 and the female student population remained slightly higher than the male population in that period. The Aboriginal student population in the same period ranged between 36 - 45 per cent of the total student population in the school. These social and demographic profiles meant that the school had to face the reality of low socio-economic status, and gender and race relations in its educational and 'law and order' fronts. Significantly, the

school operates a motto of "Co-operation and Friendship" and has pursued a mission:

> to ensure that [their] students develop the understandings, skills and attitudes relevant to individual needs, thereby enabling them to fulfil their potential and contribute to the development of our society (Carnarvon Primary School 1993, p5).

In 1993, the year that the discipline policy was introduced, an analysis of how students achieved in curriculum and social skills areas showed that the proportion of students "always achieving", as opposed to 'usually', 'occasionally' or 'needs development', ranged on average from 9 per cent to 62 per cent. The base number for this analysis was 255, being the average of all the students assessed at the time. With the exception of Music, Interpersonal skills, and School attendance where the proportion of students achieving always was 62%, 61% and 62% respectively, the 'always' level performance in other areas was less than 40% for all the students (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of students achieving 'always' in curriculum and social skills areas (averages) for the whole school in 1993 (base number = 255).



The 'always' achievement levels for the Aboriginal students were four times lower than the levels for the whole school and it ranged from 2 per cent in media analysis to 15 per cent in music. In core areas such as reading, mathematics, science and social studies, the levels were generally less than six per cent. Figures 2 and 3 present in comparative and composite forms the levels for the whole school, girls and Aboriginals.

Figure 2: Achieving 'always' in curriculum and social skills areas (averages) for the whole school, girls, and Aboriginals, 1993.

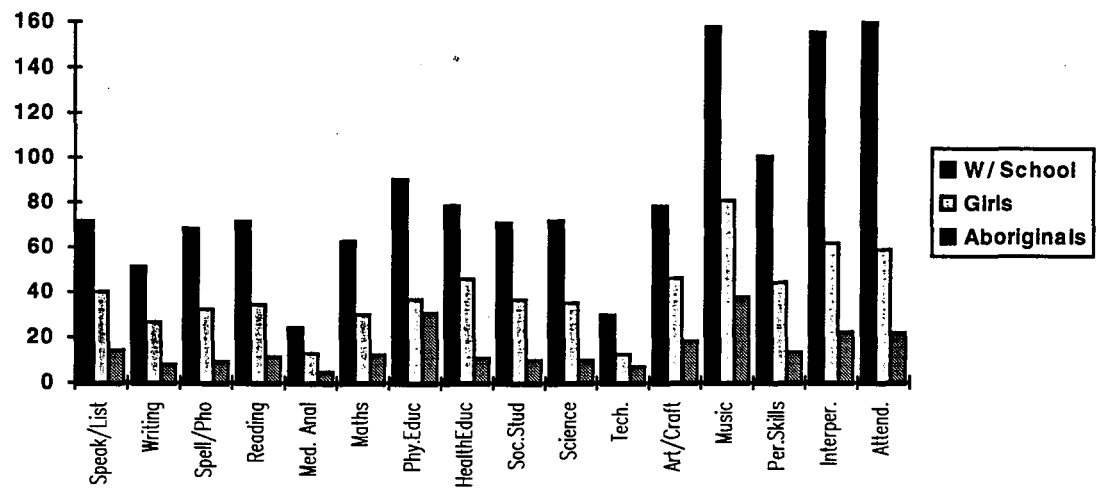
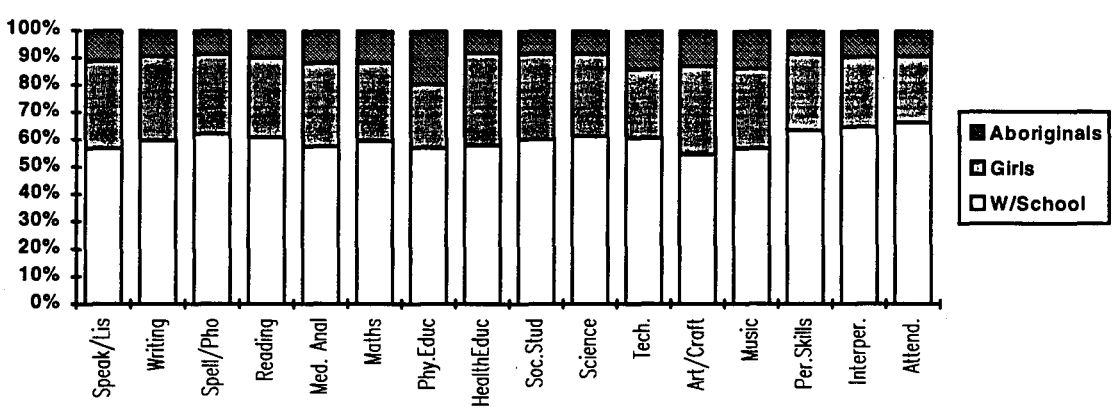


Figure 3: Stacked chart of achieving 'always' in curriculum and social skills areas (averages), 1993.



'Stability' of staff was another significant aspect of the background to the Discipline Policy. In five years (1989-1993) CPS was administered by five

Principals in rapid succession. Of the 22 teaching staff in 1993, three had been with the school for four years, three for three years, and seven for two years. The year 1993 was the first for the remaining nine. The Principal who introduced the policy under review and one of the two Deputy Principals belonged to the last category. The transient nature of staff meant, *inter alia*, that the Year 7 students in 1993 have had at least four sets of new teachers and were exposed to at least 5 different regimes of discipline under different Principals.

Needless to say, the transience would in some ways limit commitment to problem solving and continuity of social programs such as discipline policies in the school. Together with the social disadvantage of the host community and the low level of achieving 'always', especially for the Aboriginal students who constituted a significant proportion of the student population, such constraint on commitment was a recipe to make discipline problems fester in the school.

Discipline Policy formulation process

A fundamental step towards making rules or formulating discipline policy is to analyse the 'mischief' to be cured. Wielkiewicz (1986, pp39-60) discusses ten steps to formally assess behaviour problems that a school may seek to tackle with a program. The ten steps demonstrate essentially the need to clarify and appreciate the nature of the problem, its causes, its impact upon the school environment in general and learning in particular, and the appropriateness of any preventive or regulatory intervention. The analysis should address questions including: What behaviour problem do the students manifest and in what intensity? Is it an excess of a wilful behaviour

or a deficit in skills (especially social skills such as making requests and cooperative play)? What conditions precede and/or follow these behaviours? How do these behaviours affect the school environment? Is intervention necessary; if yes, what form should it take and how should it be developed?

Nature and extent of behaviour problem in CPS

Prior to the introduction of the current discipline policy in CPS, there was a general perception in the school and its host community that the school had been overrun by an intractable discipline problem that was disruptive and violent. People interviewed in the course of this research were unanimous in their views that some students had made the school 'a living hell' for their fellow students and staff. The gardeners and cleaners referred to the extent of wreckage to plants and trees and amount of littering of other refuse as evidence of students' unruly behaviour. In the view of the administration the intimidation and stress level observed among the teachers signified a school at war with itself. One respondent observed the situation towards the end of 1992 in these words: "I have never seen so many teachers so stressed in all my life; never seen so many dark rings around eyes. This was three weeks to the end of the year; you can tell that people have had a pretty tough time. The situation was grim".

The testimony of other respondents corroborated this observation. A school psychologist in Carnarvon recalled her intervention before 1993 in form of "working on CPS staff to boost [their] morale". She conducted for staff a counselling course and an in-service training on managing stress, among

other strategies. Lack of a clearly defined discipline procedure contributed to the stress. In further testimony, the psychologist said:

> last year, staff would come into the staffroom distressed, in a panic, upset because some child has been smashed, beaten or jumped on by some other child. The staff were in panic because they were unclear what should be done or who was supposed to be doing it. That situation was adding enormously to the moral problem among staff.

One Parents and Citizens Association (P&CA) representative who has associated with CPS since 1988 stated that there was

> constant change of staff...; new Principals soon realised that they had a monster on their hands... The School had a bad reputation around the town, parents were unhappy with their children's education being disrupted [and] the school was an unsavoury environment in which to work and learn...When [the new Principal] Mr Len Christie came in 1993 he was given something like a huge rampant sore that was festering and about to burst.

Among the students (especially in the upper primary) and the support staff such as the Home Liaison Officer and Aboriginal Education Workers, the recollection about the pre-policy years was similar to the description in the preceding paragraphs: students' behaviour problem was rampant and increasingly vicious. One of the Year 7 student respondents said: "the behaviour problem was really bad: swearing at teachers and making bad signs to them, back chatting them, walking away from school grounds...the school administration only told the 'bad students' not to misbehave". Clearly the community had a strong view about the nature of the problem at hand.

Causes or factors associated with the problem

Most of the people interviewed believed that faulty parenting was the main cause of the behaviour problem that manifested in the school. A sample of the responses about the causes is in order here: "parental attitude or lack of control at home - the children expected similar attitude at school"; "the bad behaviour at school was home-based"; "most homes had unemployed parents and there was lack of discipline at home"; "some parents are not educated and unable to give the kids the help the need"; and "many parents are not interested in the education of their children". The general belief was articulated quite well by one respondent in the following words:

> inconsistent parenting is the main cause of the behaviour problem. Very often parents barely want the kids let alone put in effort to make sure that they are well cared for, supervised, managed and given consequences for poor behaviour. Most of the kids that have been excluded in all the schools in Carnarvon have come from single parent families, with the mothers looking after the children...

The literature on how family influences connect with children aggressive or disruptive behaviour is a huge one and the belief expressed by the respondents in this research fits well into the socio-psychological explanations that this literature provides. Miserable family atmosphere, neglect and abuse, love deprivation, lack of initial bonding and positive socialisation, and post-divorce hostility are key concepts that have been used to capture this background (see National Committee on Violence 1990, pp77-82, for a summary review of the literature).

It should be noted, however, that aggression and disruption in children derive from an origin more complex than faulty parenting or miserable

family atmosphere. Indeed 'faulty parenting', for instance, may itself be a product of more fundamental factors such as cultural dislocation, deprived opportunity for education, unemployment and other forms of social disadvantage. Although believing that 'faulty parenting' was the main 'culprit', some respondents mentioned cultural differences, peer pressure, the failure of education to cater for certain children, repressive school ethos and lack of strong leadership in the school as other social factors that affected the nature and extent of the behaviour problem in the pre-policy period.

A document issued by the Tasmanian Department of Education in 1986 reminds us about how questionable a mono-causal view on discipline problems can be. It says:

> it is too simple to conclude that all disruptive behaviour is caused by problems outside the school. Much of the disruptive behaviour that occurs in schools can be attributed to classroom interactions involving the teachers, the individual student, and his or her peers. It is the responsibility of the teacher, as an adult and professional, to make every attempt to manage the situation in such a way as to avoid problems. Preventive measures should form the basis of management of students. Such measures must be reflected in the whole ethos of the school... (quoted in Hocking and Murphy 1992, p135).

In a similar vein Balson (1988, p1) argues that the problem lies not in faulty parenting but in "faulty interpersonal relationships which now exist between many teachers and students". This echoes previous arguments that "discipline conflicts (the most prevalent of school violence) are initiated by teachers who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize students as persons, not by students who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognized" (Alschuler 1980, p13; see also Wilkins 1984). A qualifier by Alschuler that it is the 'unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors [ie teachers],

which in turn dehumanises the oppressed [ie students]', introduces a sociological determinism into this perspective.

To what extent discipline problem can be attributed solely to classroom interactions remains a subject of intense debate. The *Radical Education Dossier*, (a production of groups based in Glebe, NSW "working to bring about democratic and socially progressive change in Australian schooling) is typical of contributions to this debate that have been articulated in broader social structural terms (see Vols. 8 and 17). According to these contributions, the inequities of the capitalist economic order cause the crises in schools, including discipline problems. These different perspectives reflect the complexity of the origins of social problems in schools or the wider community. Undoubtedly, the differences in articulating the causes of the discipline problem affect the nature of the institutional regulatory responses. But this need not be discussed in detail here. Suffice it to say, it is supremely significant that school-based preventive measures be developed and applied within a unified policy framework.

Developing a regulatory response: general approach

The behaviour problem at the CPS was so intense that by the beginning of 1993 the staff, students and parents were desperately longing for a change. "Everyone have had enough", said the President of the P&CA of the school. One non-teaching staff said: "the atmosphere in the school was like there was tension - as if you were waiting for something to happen. You knew something was going to happen, you just didn't know where and when". Towards the end of the previous year the Principal at the time had arranged that the deputies would devote 0.5 of their time to discipline matters. Given

that the main role of deputies is to provide educational leadership, this arrangement suggests that discipline problems had assumed such a proportion as to take an equivalent of one full-time deputy position to deal with it. At the first staff meeting in February 1993 the new Principal adopted a different approach, challenging all staff to be prepared to confront the situation as a team with a clearly defined discipline policy so that each staff (including the deputies) could devote more attention to teaching.

The challenge was accepted but no such policy existed in the school, hence the need to develop one. Close to hand was a document that the new Principal was familiar with. He was involved with its development at Wilson Park Primary School at some stage between 1988 and 1991. The document outlined a structured discipline policy. At a special meeting on 8 February the staff went through the document and found that with minor modifications it would meet their need, namely to empower all staff to be responsible for discipline and to create a school where staff and students longed to come, teach and learn.

The administration discussed the document with the two parent groups, the P&CA and Aboriginal Students Support and Parents Awareness Association (ASSPAA) who, being impressed with the need to "reclaim" the violence-infested school, approved overwhelmingly that the document be adopted (see *Newsletter* No. 5, p1). Thus the introduction and adoption of the policy 'capitalised' on the existing restless 'appetite' within the CPS itself and the host community for change in the school climate and the desire for a unified policy direction on discipline. The following statement by the school Principal underscores this point: "That the approach we have taken has

received the wholehearted endorsement of school and community groups and individuals is indicative of the community's desire for significant and sustained change" (Letter to Mr Moore, Minister for Education, April 30, 1993).

The way the discipline policy in CPS developed represents a classic case of rule or policy transplant. Although the discipline rules were an act of a community-level law-making, the development process conforms to all the mechanics of a cross-national legal transplantation: the existence of a need for a major reform, an instinct in the country of need to first look at solutions in other jurisdictions, great respect for the rule or policy to be borrowed, and accessibility of the rule to the country in need, by way of familiar language and documented source materials (Omaji 1993b, p41). The CPS experience met all of these conditions and there was nothing unusual about that, as the history of legal development in the Western world generally is one of borrowing with adaptation (Watson 1974). The previous involvement of the person introducing the rule to another place, like Mr Len Christie who had encountered this type of policy before at Wilson Park, is a factor not highlighted by the existing literature on legal transplant but it is nonetheless fundamental for explaining the smooth transplantation of the policy to CPS. As will be seen in Chapter three, Mr Len Christie played a leading role in CPS adopting the policy.

The development of discipline policies in other schools and jurisdictions within Australia seems to have taken a somewhat different path. In South Australian state schools, for instance, discipline policies evolved through discussions that enabled school communities to establish shared values

about their children's behaviour at school, translate these values into expectations about behaviour at school for all members of the school community, express these expectations as statements of individual rights and responsibilities required for people to learn together, and develop community-supported consequences to enforce these rights and responsibilities (see Johnson 1992, p84).

Developing a regulatory response: involvement of stakeholders

The manner in which individuals or groups who are most likely to encounter a social instrument get involved contribute to its development affects significantly the extent to which they accept or support the instrument. Staff, students, parents, the wider host community, and education departments would be affected by a discipline policy and, *ipso facto*, have to be involved in decision-making regarding the policy. The South Australian approach referred to in the preceding paragraph underlines this imperative. Similarly, the WA Ministry of Education (1992, p2) expresses the significance of this point thus:

> involving people in decision-making processes relating to matters that affect them is likely to result in decisions that address their concerns... By sharing responsibility for decision-making in a school, parents, other community members and school staff members can work together towards shared goals. Teachers are able to direct their efforts towards student outcomes that are supported by the school's community. School staff members benefit from knowing that their efforts are supported by the whole school community. Parents and other community members can be confident that their viewpoints and expectations have been represented in the setting of the school's [discipline] objectives.

A review of a whole-school approach to discipline in Western Australia found that schools use a number of structures to get stakeholders involved: committees, staff meetings, questionnaires or surveys, small-group discussions, pastoral care groups, subject classes, Student Councils, Parents and Citizens' Associations, and School Councils (WA Ministry of Education 1989, pp24-26).

Stakeholders get involved in the initial formulation of a policy at different points and to a varying degree. This was the experience at the CPS. Given the situation of 'rule transplantation', the scope for most of the stakeholders to negotiate the core values embedded in the policy was minimal. However, the Principal who introduced the model used various structures to ensure maximum involvement of the school community - especially the teaching staff and parents - in discussing, understanding, and publicising the model.

At a specially convened meeting early in the year, the teachers examined the model in detail and modified it to suit their local situation. Most of the non-teaching staff did not know about the policy until they began to notice some changes in the students' behaviour. The students interviewed indicated that they had little or no role in modifying and adopting the policy but they were informed about its application to the discipline problem in the school soon after the teachers had adopted it. The two parent groups were consulted prior to the policy being enforced and, after a detailed explanation of its workings, they gave their wholehearted support.

Other community members whose support for the policy was obtained in early days of the project included Mr Phil Lockyer (WA Member of

Legislative Council), Mr Kevin Leahy (WA Member of Legislative Assembly), Shire President Mr Tom Day, Shire Clerk Bruce Walker, and Senior Constable John Vuckovich. The District Superintendent for Geraldton North Education Office was also informed about the policy and he offered his total support. While these stakeholders were not part of the initial discussion of the policy at the school level, they were sufficiently aware of the 'cry for help' at the CPS and, therefore, were open to any measure that promised to save the school from disruption, intimidation and violence.

Using a five-point scale of decision procedures by which school principals relate to their staff (the scale ranges from authoritarian through 'debriefing', consultation, joint decision-making to delegation), the initial development of the CPS discipline policy straddles the third and fourth points. Testimonies during this research show that the Principal engaged in extensive consultation and joint decision-making in adopting and implementing the policy. This finding follows closely the analysis by Williams and Norris (1978) that shows that on school discipline rules, as opposed to say hiring a new clerk, the modal procedure adopted by principals was point four (joint decision-making). It had high mean and low standard deviation. Their explanation is that 'discipline' was seen as a teacher's territory as well as a Principal's territory and that it impacts directly on the classroom teaching or the general educational functions of the school - areas in which teachers and principals share a strong presence.

The students that were interviewed pointed out that their involvement in the initial development of the policy was very little or non-existent. A WA

Ministry of Education guideline states that "a school's discipline policy should be developed through a process of consultation with all those affected by its recommendations", including students (WA Ministry of Education 1988, p3). As with the other stakeholders, the 'borrowing approach' coupled with the need to develop a regulatory response urgently could be one reason for this lack of opportunity for a student input. However, existing evidence suggest that this might be the norm in most local and overseas schools.

Commenting on the US experience in the early 1980s, Aschuler (1980, p49) argued that "the lack of participation by students in determining the rules governing even the most trivial aspects of their lives in school is a nationwide phenomenon and one cause of nationwide violence in schools". A more recent study in 1986 of the formulation of discipline policy in the Australian Capital Territory Government schools shows that students had the biggest proportion of "little or no role" (43%) and about the smallest of "the leading role" (4%) compared with Principals, teachers and parents (quoted in Stoddart 1992, p150). A Western Australian study shows that even where students were involved in the initial development of discipline policies, they were restricted to developing rights and responsibilities and, only in a few schools, were they allowed to design consequences for breaking the school rules. Several respondents in that study "considered the student involvement had been token" (WA Ministry of Education 1989, p25).

Existing wisdom shows that "student involvement is absolutely essential if students are to value the school and monitor their own behaviour" (Wayson

and Lesley 1984, p419). As Wilkins (1984, p2) put it, "negotiated rules are easier to enforce because pupils feel a sense of ownership over the rules that they have helped make. They are less likely to disregard their own rules and often discipline each other when breaches occur". A case study of a school in New South Wales where every student was involved in deciding on the school rules shows that "in general, discipline problems were diminished. Kids had an investment in those rules, they knew why they existed, they felt they had a say in deciding them and they stuck to them" (Hawkins 1982?, p27).

CPS Discipline Policy Document: content analysis

What was the scope of the CPS Discipline Policy? What values did it embody? And, how suitable was the instrument in relation to the problem targeted? Answers to these questions would extend how we appreciate the issues addressed in the foregoing reflection. An attempt is made here to seek these answers through a content analysis of the document containing the policy.

The philosophy, aims, rules, and procedures

In a human transaction that is so value-laden as correcting or addressing unacceptable behaviour in students, it is hard to conceal one's philosophical assumptions even when they are unstated. The CPS discipline policy document does not leave the underlying philosophy unstated. Rather it expresses this philosophy in rights terms: "Our teachers have the right to teach. Our children have the right to learn". This suggests outright that the discipline regime being introduced in CPS would not focus merely on teachers' relative power and authority (earned or imposed) but on the joint

"due rights of all parties in the education [community]" (Rogers 1990, p13). In so doing, the policy aligns the discipline regime it embodies with "a resurgence of discipline policy direction based around rights" since the 1980s (ibid, p86). Indeed, WA Ministry of Education had in 1988 stated its belief "that students, parents and teachers have the right to a safe, orderly school environment where students can learn and teachers can teach" (WA Ministry of Education 1988, p1)

Pursuant to the rights-based philosophy, the policy outlines about fourteen aims to reduce stress and modify children's behaviour; provide a safe, happy and positive learning environment; encourage personal development including students' self worth, self esteem, community pride and mutual respect; cultivate acceptance and support from the community for the policy; and keep the policy in harmony with the general approach of the Ministry of Education. The pride of place given to stress reduction and behaviour modification is consistent with the mischief that was the main focus of attention during the initial discussion about a regulatory intervention as shown earlier in this chapter.

However, attention to other issues such as personal development and community support suggests that the scope of the policy extends beyond merely maintaining stress-related law and order or establishing a better form of control in the school. The aims of the policy seem to address all the human needs outlined in Maslow's hierarchy, with the exception of some physiological needs such as food, warmth and sleep (Maslow 1962). The aim "to provide a physically and emotionally safe environment relates to the safety needs of freedom from anxiety, pain and threat. To assist children "to

become acceptable and productive members of a changing society" connects with the affiliative needs for love and acceptance from parents, teachers, and peers. Similarly, the object of increasing students' positive self-images agrees with Maslow's conception of 'esteem needs' such as acquiring confidence in one's own ability. Finally, helping students to "reach their full potential more easily" is similar to what Maslow sees as achieving self actualisation needs such as creative expression and independence of thought and action.

A question arises as to how such a psychologically oriented and school-focused policy can suitably deal with what the community overwhelmingly identified to be the causes of misbehaviour at CPS, namely faulty parenting and social disadvantage. Even if the policy enables the school, as it does, to teach students self control, self esteem and respect for social rules - values that a sizeable number cannot get at home, how does it pass this ability on to parents who should in turn reinforce the values to their children? Obviously the policy does not prescribe that the school eliminate the parental shortcomings that undergird the school discipline problems.

Some respondents observed that 'the present policy does not consider factors outside school such as students having late night sleep, coming to school dirty and without food'. In a rather passionate tone one respondent said:

> we've got to address the reasons why the kids do not fit in, in the first place. Many of them feel totally insecure or not knowing where they are going to sleep tonight. Kids come to school already feeling they are not like other children in their class, feeling abnormal, atypical,

> misfit and unwanted: a no-hoper. Teachers can not make up for this. A lot needs to be done at the system and political levels.

The argument is that while the policy has the potential to make the school environment safer by capping aggressive and disruptive behaviour, and to reduce stress level for teachers, it does little in terms of addressing the structural conflicts which most of the 'deviant' students experience outside the school.

The rules in stage one of the steps in the discipline policy suggest that the school does not disregard the possibility of outside factors impinging on the students' behaviour, nor does it overlook its own limit. For instance, on the one hand, some rules direct teachers to "tune into student experiences", "know something about [students'] background and interests", "show understanding of students experiences". On the other hand, teachers are advised to "avoid coming up with what [they] think is the solution to [students'] problem" and "when children talk about something that concerns them, the teacher should actively listen and reflect back what the child has said". This suggests that although the policy recognises that most of the behaviour problems have an external origin, it prescribes an insular approach to dealing with those problems.

There are points at which the school and community interact closely over discipline issues, one of which is encapsulated in the policy by the aim: "to develop in children a responsibility for their own actions *in partnership with the child's family*" (emphasis, added). But even at that point the policy does not require nor does it entitle the school to probe or address family matters that bear on the behaviour problem at hand. Thus both in philosophy and

aims, the CPS discipline policy seems to address the individual responsibility of students solely within the context of the school.

There are seven stages in the discipline policy through which the individual responsibility is processed and, significantly, the first is the demand on individual teachers to establish positive classrooms. In addition to the advice referred to in the preceding paragraphs, teachers are to encourage the behaviour they wish to see continued; be caring, warm, fair but firm with classroom rules; develop rapport outside the classroom; and use negotiation skills to guide students to solve their own problem. To these demands, teachers are to add ample lesson preparation, regular feedback to students and rewarding of children in a positive manner for their appropriate behaviour.

The remaining six stages apply to individual students progressively from "a warning and three chances to correct the inappropriate behaviour", to classroom withdrawal, interclass withdrawal, time out in a specified area away from all other children, suspension from the school and, finally, to exclusion. For each of these stages the policy outlines procedures - a structured course of action - to be followed by teachers. Teachers are to use their professional judgement to determine when a school rule has been breached, but beyond that they are obliged in the event of a breach to initiate appropriate action in accordance with the discipline policy.

To facilitate the discharge of this obligation two lists are provided to each class; they contain uniform classroom and playground rules, and unacceptable behaviours and their consequences. The rules cover matters

such as obedience to teachers, care for property, safe and sensible movement, 'no assault', playing in designated areas, and punctuality. There are about twenty-nine categories of unacceptable behaviours to which specific consequences of varying severity attach. 'Leaving classroom without permission' attracts warning first time and classroom withdrawal second time; 'blatant hitting of other children first time gets interclass withdrawal straightaway followed by time out second time; 'swearing at a teacher or adult' first time is met with time out and suspension, the second time; and so on.

Of the 29 categories of unacceptable behaviours, three appear to be regulated with most severity, as they attract suspension second time. These three categories - running away from school, swearing at a teacher or adult, and sexual molestation of a child - arguably represent three of the dominant values that the policy seeks to protect namely, the values of compulsory education, respect for authority figures or adults, and decency. Crittenden (1979, p37) made a relevant point when he observed that "in a morally pluralistic society there are often difficulties over what values the school may defend". Yet it cannot be reasonably doubted that schools are well placed to contribute significantly to moral education through the application of a discipline policy or otherwise. Like Crittenden, this author holds the view that moral pluralism cannot deny that there are basic or core moral values such as justice, truth telling or honesty, mutual help, concern for others, and spiritual wholeness on which the welfare of the members of a society depend. Schools have a responsibility to ascertain and teach those values.

For the rest of the categories of offences, unless circumstances require 'short circuiting', the process of enforcing the policy goes more or less through 27 steps before suspension, including 21 class withdrawals, three interclass withdrawal intervals and three time-out intervals.

Theoretical context of the policy

A close examination of the policy reveals that its history, form and content do not exist in a vacuum, rather they emanate from and remain anchored to an array of ideas, principles, standards, and rules derived from well-established models or theoretical guides dating back to the 1950s (for a discussion of the distinction between ideas, principles and rules for purposes of law-making, see Twining and Miers 1982, pp126-140). For instance, the overall structure and content of the policy appear to be consistent with the three aspects of discipline described in a 1959 WA Dept of Education Circular:

* the role and function of the principal, and the whole school in creating and maintaining a school climate conducive to learning and acceptable forms of behaviour;

* the work of teachers [in] establishing the class tone in which disciplinary problems are least likely to occur; and

* breaches of discipline and their consequences (see Hyde 1992, p62).

The three classroom withdrawals preceding every major interval in the policy steps bear resemblance to the 'three-chance plan' suggested by Silberman and Wheelan (1980): warning for first time rule breaking, statement of consequences for the second time and application of consequences for the third time. The systematic or step by step procedures

for removing disruptive students from classroom activities to an isolation corner and finally suspension or exclusion, and the notions of individual responsibility for one's own actions, and 'contracting' are unmistakably 'Glasserian' in orientation (see Glasser 1965, 1969, 1986).

Canter and Canter's (1987) *Assertive Discipline* supplies the 'limit setting and follow through' principle that the policy has enacted both to empower the teachers and to establish a consistent and firm discipline regime in the school. The rights-based philosophy and the involvement of parents from stage three onwards in handling student discipline problems both echo the WA Ministry of Education (1989) *Guidelines for School Discipline.* Similarly, the pastoral flavour (eg be caring and warm, give courteous attention) and emphasis on effective communication (eg listening and sending clear messages) which the policy demands of teachers suggest profoundly that the principles of the Whole-school Approach (Managing Students Behaviour) Program which has been used in WA since 1983 have been adopted. Lastly, the rules of suspension and exclusion follow closely the Education Act and Regulations and the Ministry's Guidelines for Student Exclusion Panel.

A lot can be learnt about a school from the form, content and theoretical underpinnings of its discipline rules. Rules "may impose duties, distribute benefits or confer power or discretion to act on certain persons...[They] may also...confer privileges, liberties, and...impose liabilities" (Twining and Miers 1982, p12). In so doing, they indicate general orientations or prevailing ideologies in the school which may be interventionist, paternalistic, autocratic or democratic. Often it is the theoretical foundation

of the policy that determines the character of its rules and the way they are implemented.

Balson (1988, p4) argues that any system or policy that embodies values such as domination, competition, rewards and punishments, social inequality, pressure from above, sole responsibility and lack of respect is traditional and autocratic. On the other hand a democratic policy would seek to enact social equality, mutual respect, shared responsibility, co-operation and self-discipline. Depending on one's interpretation, these criteria mean that there is no democratic system in the world. No, not one! Interestingly the CPS discipline policy embodies values from both categories. For instance, it aims to teach individuals to take responsibility for their own actions (an autocratic trait) and to promote mutual respect (a democratic trait). What is it then: an autocratic regime, democratic system or both?

While criticising most of the models that we have shown to underpin the CPS policy, Slee (1992, p6) asserts that those models - by Glasser, Canter, etc - amount to psychologism (ie concentrating on the individual student) and encourage the craving for quick-fixes for complex issues. Compared to Balson's analysis, this critique deserves more attention in relation to the character of the CPS policy in the sense that every policy has the potential to be a short-term crisis management or be connected to long-term educational goals. Earlier we indicated that, given the understanding of the people within its own community of what caused the student behaviour problem namely faulty parenting, the school has adopted a discipline policy that is anything but fundamental or holistic. That is to say it concentrates solely on individual students and the behaviour they manifest at school and

does not address the disadvantage which underlies the behaviour. But the school was not pretentious about the scope of its intervention which was to ensure that teachers and children who came to school could teach and learn in a less hazardous environment. The Louden Report (1985), a major inquiry into discipline problems in WA schools, identified this to be "an expectation that society has of education", namely "to ensure that schools are orderly places...". Whether schools are capable of doing more, or should use short-term or long-term measures to fulfil this expectation is open to debate.

The CPS discipline policy, analysed in its own terms, represents a consistent and coherent instrument, with a well-focused philosophy and aims. Although the stakeholders at CPS had little input in the substance of the policy, they may well have found acceptable the social values underpinning the form and content of the instrument and its potential to perform. Given the largely external origin of the misbehaviours, as the respondents alleged, the tendency of the policy to concentrate on students as individuals responsible wholly for their actions could be a significant drawback. However, having its foundation in a broad and long-standing models means that the policy's contents and procedures have in their girdles a tradition tested over time.

CHAPTER THREE

CPS DISCIPLINE POLICY: IMPLEMENTATION DESIGN

Many meritorious policies, however well intentioned and structured, show their capacity to achieve or fall short of their goals usually at the implementation stage. The critical factors at this stage include the marketing strategies, the day-to-day operation, the institutional support, and the sensitivity or constant attention of the operators to the dynamics of these policies. A close examination of the CPS Discipline Policy suggests a reasonably well designed implementation process and, as the following comments will show, this has involved some ingenuity on the part of the school's administration.

Marketing strategies

Knowledge about a policy is an important element in how successfully that policy can be implemented. Little can be achieved in substance with a policy that "may be more familiar to dignitaries visiting a school than to the school's teachers...students [and parents]" (WA Ministry of Education 1989, p29). The administration in CPS clearly avoided this pitfall by adopting a variety of strategies to make its Discipline Policy known widely.

Beginning at the first staff meeting in 1993, the discipline issues and policy were placed firmly on the school agenda throughout the year. The content of the Policy and the process of implementing it were discussed, and it was resolved that staff would 'learn on the job' and be supported by the administration in ways including an ongoing explanation. Among the

pillars of this process is a widely known maxim in the school: "when in doubt communicate". Research evidence suggests that the staff used this appealing invitation for clarification to a maximum effect and, in the process, acquired functional knowledge and proficiency in the operation of the Policy. Respondents held overwhelmingly that both teaching and non-teaching staff of the school have become fully aware of the policy and its applications.

The administration publicised the policy to the students in a different manner. They gave the students a brief but stirring introduction to the policy early in the year at a school assembly, presenting them with a clear and simple choice between 'positive reinforcement for winners' and 'slips and warnings for losers'. Along with this choice was an unambiguous challenge for them to aspire to be winners. An interview with a sample of the students suggested that most students had known the consequences that follow behaviours which break school rules. A good number of staff confirmed this finding.

During the first research visit this author went through all the classrooms and noticed that the Policy philosophy and the classroom and playground rules were displayed at different but generally conspicuous locations. The most widely used location was above the board in front of the class. Other locations include the in-class notice board, the side flap of wooden cupboards, placed mostly near the door to the rooms, and the wall at the back of the class. Scholars on school discipline have emphasised the need to display rules conspicuously and to frequently or regularly remind children of them (see Alschuler 1980, p105). Stage one of the CPS Discipline

Procedures encourages teachers to display the rules and remind students periodically, as part of establishing positive classroom. Other discipline-related items displayed in classrooms include the list of classroom and playground 'unacceptable behaviours' and 'consequences', discipline charts, and 'congratulations' plus 'guest of honour' certificates.

The use of cartoons or comic illustrations as a way of communicating the rules to the children has been shown to be a powerful strategy, especially with the younger classes. In the course of this investigation, this author saw three comic posters displayed in one classroom with these messages: "Hello" (Be friendly); "Thank you, you are welcome" (Be courteous); and "May I help" (Be thoughtful). In another class, a poster entitled "Daily Code of Conduct" bears this message:

Today I will ...

Speak out against racism, discrimination and injustice
Treat everyone equally and fairly
Be sensitive and thoughtful to those around me
Accept that everybody is different
See people and not colours or race
Respect the rights of others, no matter who they are

Today I won't...

Participate in racist behaviour or use derogatory names
Condone racist jokes
Shut out someone who looks different
Make fun of someone who's having problems with English
Be condescending and patronising towards others
Pick on someone b'cos they're from a different background

RACISM HURTS EVERYONE

The point about using comic illustrations or visual aids relates to the need to consider easy and effective means of reaching different ages of children

with information about school rules. The literature on child behaviour management emphasises a developmental context for presenting and implementing discipline rules and argues that comic illustrations be used for primary age children (see Wielkiewicz 1986; pp 24-27). The message about racism is particularly relevant to the school whose population comprises a significant 'ethnic divide', numerically and culturally, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students; and the composition of the classes is such that the message would have great effect especially on the upper primary where the 'politics of difference' is likely to be more defined and real.

Awareness of the Discipline Policy for the parents was pursued on a protracted basis. Apart from the initial information at the meetings of the P&CA and ASSPAA in February 1993, the administration regularly placed a reminder in school newsletters to parents. In 12 out of 32 newsletters during the first three terms of the school, the policy was generously publicised. *Newsletter No. 1* outlined the classroom and playground rules to be enforced through the Discipline Policy and invited parents to discuss them with their children at home. The second newsletter described the philosophy, aims and procedures of the Policy, including the following statement of intent:

> Disciplinary techniques are used to teach positive ways of behaving and taking responsibility for actions. They are not intended to punish or enforce blind obedience. Logical consequences are invoked in a relaxed manner, after feelings have calmed. They imply goodwill.

One newsletter carried information to the effect that selection for attendance at camps would be based on good behaviour as determined through the

Discipline Policy. Apparently this was to convey to the parents the strategic place of the Policy in the life of the school (see *Newsletter No. 14*, p2). Similarly the administration relayed to the parents through a newsletter the commendations of the Minister for Education, Mr Norman Moore and the District Superintendent, Mr Steffan Silcox, who visited the school in September 1993. Both commended the school programs (including the implementation of the Discipline Policy) in these words: "Keep up the good work" (Moore); "Congratulations on an excellent school" (Silcox) (*Newsletter No. 29*, p1). Whether or not it was intended, this information suggested that the spotlight on the policy and other aspects of the school came from Carnarvon and beyond and that parents could be confident about the policy.

While outlining the 'numerous achievements' of Term 3, the administration noted in *Newsletter No. 32* that "the most significant and pleasing achievement has been the continuing decline in unacceptable behaviour and the positive and exemplary behaviour displayed by the children of this great school". This was probably calculated to enhance the parents' appreciation of the policy, but it certainly helped to project discipline as a current issue. Early in the year Mr Moore, in a letter to the Principal, had anticipated that, given the "wide consultation, acceptance and understanding..., [the] students and their parents will no doubt fully appreciate the benefit of a discipline policy that ensures educational outcomes are enhanced for all students" (27 April, 1993). The policy has more or less become a household name in the School's community and beyond.

The administration needs to be cautious about the extent to which they rely on newsletters to correspond with or inform parents. In an interview with some parents, especially those whose children had behaviour problems, it was understood that some children often did not deliver the newsletters to their parents. Among the parents that received newsletters regularly, some could not read. While there are many other avenues that the school has designed in order to inform parents and to ensure that parents participate in the life of the school, this objective might continue to be achieved on a less than optimal scale if the delivery and understanding of the newsletters cannot be guaranteed.

CPS Discipline Policy: day-to-day operation

Classrooms and school playgrounds are two sites where the day-to-day operation of the policy is most visible. At both sites, the dynamics of student-student and student-teacher interactions are different and should be reflected in the way the policy is implemented. The CPS policy document shows sensitivity to this difference and contains advice for teachers in regard to both sites. For instance, teachers are to "be aware that children are playful by nature and recognise this difference from deliberate, obnoxious behaviour" in the playgrounds. Since the bulk of the interactions takes place in classrooms, the operation described in the following relates more to the classroom situation in CPS.

Progression

A child, from Pre-primary to Year 7, who breaks a classroom rule 'is given a warning and three chances to correct the inappropriate behaviour'; this approach is similar to or incorporates steps four, five and six of Glasser

(1975). The policy provides two ways of giving warning and chances: name and ticks on the board or verbal apprehension. Most of the teachers have used the first option more and their testimonies, which have been corroborated by the student respondents, show that this option is easier to remember and more accessible to students in monitoring the way they progress through the discipline chart. After three chances the child goes to the next stage and records of this progress are kept on the classroom wall chart, but two or fewer warnings 'are nullified at the end of each day'.

At the classroom withdrawal stage the child is isolated within the class but away from other children for a specified time; he or she 'negotiates a... verbal or written contract' with the classroom teacher and after satisfactory completion returns to her normal original position. Teachers contact parents or guardians at their discretion at this stage. After three in-class withdrawals a child goes into interclass withdrawal which involves the child going to another classroom (teachers arrange beforehand the classes they would send disruptive children to). If there is no successful resolution or the child has again reached a 'qualifying' stage after previous interclass withdrawals, the child goes into "time-out" - a specified area away from all other children. Three times in time-out or a violation of any time-out rules would take the child to the suspension stage, from where he or she can return to stage one, if the suspension had led to the behaviour being modified. Otherwise, the child will progress to the exclusion stage (ie if the behaviour problem persists).

Beyond stage three (ie after the end of classroom withdrawal), teachers become more obliged to use colour-coded slips and proformas to

communicate to each other and to the parents the details of offences the students commit. These materials form the basis of the documentation of reasons for any of the sanctions that might apply later. Most of the teachers interviewed admitted that initially the whole exercise was tedious but, with time and increasing familiarity, the process became less and less burdensome. Indeed, at the time of this research the level of awareness in the school community (ie about the day to day operation of the policy) was significantly high. Students, non-teaching staff, and teachers alike displayed remarkable acquaintance with the processes and could discuss accurately their progression.

One aspect of the processes over which most respondents appeared unclear is the 'punishment' inherent in the policy as a whole. The policy document states that "disciplinary techniques are used to teach positive ways of behaving...not to punish or to enforce blind obedience". Further, "the purpose of...[withdrawals]...time out and suspension is to (a) give the child time to calm down and reflect on the unacceptable behaviour; [and] (b) allow the class teacher and the children to continue lessons...without disruption". The respondents generally took these consequences as punishment and differed only on how lenient or harsh the punishment should be. Works such as *Behaviour Management in the Schools* (Wielkiewicz 1986) identify time out and other consequences as techniques of non-violent punishment, thus supporting the view of the respondents that the CPS discipline policy contains punishment.

Consistent with the belief that the child in isolation would reflect on his or her unacceptable behaviour, the policy provides that during withdrawals

such a child 'is not to perform tasks unless part of negotiated contract' or, during time-out, should not be 'allowed to do any work, reading or games'. If the essence of time out, as Wielkiewicz (1986, p71) claims, "is that a child is placed in a boring location, where nothing of interest is available", the assumption in the CPS policy about positive reflection in such a location becomes questionable. A comment by a non-teaching staff during the interview on the design of time-out in the policy is interesting:

> They [ie children] sit and fiddle in the corner which isn't doing them anything except making them bored...They are not being punished, they could be sitting there day-dreaming thinking about doing evil like going to steal lollies after school. They quite enjoy being out of classroom and not doing class work. I believe that students who can't work wobble so they can be sent out.

An Aboriginal respondent, commenting on what the isolation principle means to some Aboriginal children, made a similar point:

> you withdraw the students who are playing up. Fair enough, but you are isolating them and sometimes you might be doing exactly what they want. They want to be isolated; so you are feeding on exactly what they want. Look at what those isolated are missing, [but this] is not given due consideration. Students who miss out [for reasons of withdrawal or time out] should be made to do whatever thing they had missed: reading, spelling, doing test and so on. [There is need] to bring those students [up] to the level their class has reached.

The flow-on effect of the sanctions built into the policy is clearly an area that could have significant implications for fulfilling the vision that the policy sets out to achieve. Timeout provides a good illustration. The existing literature "cautions that the use of timeout involves the potential for violations of the individual rights of the student" (Wherry 1983 quoted in Wielkiewicz op cit, p72). For a social program such as the CPS discipline

policy whose philosophy is rights-based, this caution is likely to strike a strong chord. On the basis of judicial proceedings, Wherry advised that "the length of timeout should not exceed fifty minutes to one hour"; and that "the child should be provided with books or lesson materials during timeout" (id). In any case, time-out environments should not be more rewarding or attractive to a child than normal class environment. The time-out in the CPS policy is a minimum of one third of a day (ie at least two hours) and, as shown earlier, the child is not to do any work. Evidence suggests that teachers did not adhere strictly to this standard in practice, mainly for reasons of expediency and not because they were mindful of any judicial or learning implications.

Another area on which some strong views were expressed during the research was the application of the policy sanctions, unmodified, to the junior primary, especially the pre-primaries. While some respondents saw no difficulty with such application, others felt strongly that some of the sanctions - especially time-out - were inappropriate. Conventional wisdom states that the length of a timeout period can vary considerably, and some writers "suggest 1 minute of timeout for each year of age" (ibid, p73). So for a five year-old this would be five minutes with a possible extension to 10 minutes. Generally the respondents thought that the policy needed to be refined to make it suitable for the pre-primary classes.

Towards the end of 1993 the policy was revised and in the process the requirements for withdrawal were modified. The current version allows parents to take children in pre-primary home for the period they are expected to be in interclass withdrawal. This was in response *inter alia* to

the views canvassed in a celebrated case during 1993, and it demonstrates that the policy can be sensitive to the circumstances or views of its community.

Institutional support

As shown earlier, the community support which intensive consultation yielded for the policy was remarkable. Equally outstanding was the commitment of the generality of the school staff and students to implementing the policy. It appears that the institutional factors that sustained such commitment included strong leadership by the Principal, professional development for staff, and positive reinforcement for students.

In more ways than one it can argued that the policy was the baby of the Principal, Mr Len Christie. As mentioned earlier, he was involved with the development of the policy at Wilson Park; he introduced it to the CPS and championed its implementation and publicity. In all this, as the respondents maintained, he exercised his personal dedication with the limitlessness of a 'brooding omnipresence' but brooked no personal aggrandisement.

A non-teaching staff attempted in the following words to capture the general opinion in the school and the host community on this point: "the policy has worked extremely well. I think that the character of the Principal has got a lot to do with the running of the school...". A study by the British School Inspectorate, entitled *Ten Good Schools* (1977), identified quality leadership of the principal as one of four institutional factors that make school programs successful: it ensures clarity of aims, sound discipline, good teaching, and attention to the welfare of every student. "This...was the key

factor from which all the other virtues sprang" (Stott 1982, p287). The P&CA Committee, in nominating Mr Christie for a Rotary award, stated that he "continually [supported] the teachers' endeavours to reclaim the school" (more on this nomination later).

Mr Christie actively encouraged staff development courses for the school, one being the Systematic Training for Effective Teaching (STET) which seventeen staff members completed in Term 2 of 1993. An evaluation of this course shows that the participants gained tremendously in areas including the understanding of students' misbehaviour, encouragement procedures, sending I-messages, and application of consequences. These areas have direct relevance for the operation of the Discipline Policy as the following comments of some of the participants indicate:

> "The prospect of improving the environment in the classroom for both children and teacher inspired me to do this course".
>
> "I know that in order to cater properly for all my students I needed to know much more about them. This course offered real strategies for this".
>
> "What inspired me to do this course - to have knowledge of any/every possible strategy to make my/students lives in the classroom equitable/reasonable".
>
> "...STET helped me to evaluate my teaching style and strategies in the classroom. It gave me helpful tips...".

Most participants self-rated themselves to be better, after the course, at the skills and knowledge in matters that affect the climate of their classrooms in particular and the school in general. This author interviewed the course

organiser who said: "the value of [the course] was for the staff to realise that with children persistently behaving in an unacceptable way there are always reasons but that does not make the behaviour acceptable. [Staff] must follow through with the consequences". The Principal was a major inspiration behind this 'logical consequences' practice.

Remarkably, these consequences were not all negative in CPS. Positive reinforcement is built into the discipline policy and has been practised liberally throughout the year. Section 7 in Stage one of the Policy Step by Step encourages staff to "reward children in a positive manner for their appropriate behaviour"; this involves the use of stickers, incentive prizes, and certificates of merit or honour. The policy expects that "during the course of the year each child will receive an Honour Certificate presented at a School Assembly". This provision enacts the principle of "catch 'em doing good" which Glasser (1975) presents in step three of his guidelines: "give positive reinforcement to students when they are not misbehaving... Students will get a balanced message - this teacher can be nice as well as tough".

In practice the principle was quite visible in the life of the school. Newsletters carried names of children, staff and community members that received certificates at school assemblies (eg see *Newsletter* No. 34, November 3, 1993). Most respondents (staff and students) affirmed that the reinforcement "makes kids feel good about themselves". Commenting on the amount of rewards the school dispenses relative to the student population, one respondent said: "I have never been in a school where so much is given to so few; but in the end it has paid off".

Another respondent said "positive reinforcement is vital but to so many kids it is so unfamiliar. Certificates at assembly cannot be appreciated, positives appear so foreign...". In philosophical terms, this was a profound observation as students must have cognisance of something for it to be truly rewarding. Nonetheless, it is generally held that "positive reinforcement carries no such cognitive requirement", for simply giving attention can cause the behaviour targeted to be repeated and sustained (Montgomery 1989, p59).

In view of the enormous attention given to positive reinforcement in the theory and practice of the policy, this author found the existing title of the policy to be anomalous. 'Discipline Policy' sounded quite threatening and tended to conceal the great concern shown by the intervention for students to acquire social skills in a 'non-disciplining' context. While the policy contains punishments for unacceptable behaviours, the predominance of reward for appropriate behaviour suggests that 'Social Skills Policy', as a title, reflects better the scope and spirit of the intervention.

Positive reinforcement was undoubtedly one of the pillars on which the policy rested. However, the determined manner in which the administration canvassed for and got wide support for the policy, especially in the wider community, resulted in the good feeling within the school being reinforced by positive acknowledgments from external sources. The combined effect of the reward system and community goodwill on the school climate as a whole will be examined in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

CPS DISCIPLINE POLICY AND CHANGES IN THE SCHOOL CLIMATE

As with most social programs, to determine whether a particular discipline intervention is, in fact, responsible for any observed change in a target school is fraught with difficulties. Psychological research has depended largely on experimental procedures to examine such connection (see Dietz and Hummel 1978, p54). This research did not use experimental procedures neither did it aim to establish any causal connection between the introduction of the discipline policy and the changes that occurred in CPS in 1993. Rather, the research sought to analyse how the stakeholders perceived the experience of the school following the adoption of the policy and the statistical variation in the rates of rule breaking or suspension throughout that year. The focus of this chapter is thus the school climate and the basic characteristics of offences for which students were suspended. The interaction of the discipline policy with both issues is examined in associational rather than causal terms.

School climate

Research evidence suggests that the CPS witnessed a remarkable upliftment in the feeling of comfort and confidence among its community in 1993. In the perception of many members of the school community who were interviewed about this phenomenon, the discipline policy stood like a colossus. All hands pointed towards its direction.

At the time of this research a perceptive visitor to the School would sense among the staff and students, warmth and exuberance laced with hope. The teachers and parents who were interviewed during the first research visit readily admitted that "the Carnarvon Primary School has witnessed a dramatic change for the better in its climate...things are a lot better this year than the previous years...the school is rapidly becoming a safe environment to work in". An entry in the diary of this author at the end of the first day at the school reads like this: "...I was introduced to a few teachers that were around. The atmosphere was respectful and convivial. Len showed me around the school; in the classrooms I observed signs of commitment and a united vision..."

Other opportunities presented themselves at which the pulse of the climate of the school could be felt. During the 1993 Education Week in October, the school mounted a display in the shopping mall of the works done by the students under the guidance of the teachers. Significantly, the works were displayed with a functional pride. Some parents (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike) interviewed at the display cited 1993 as a turning point in the efforts of the school to handle discipline problems and to change community images about the school. Within the Education Week also, the school held an assembly to recognise people who were making remarkable contributions to its corporate life. The Geraldton North District superintendent, Mr Stefan Silcox, who made an inspired and inspiring presentation speech, declared: "I have spoken to community leaders in Carnarvon...and I hear comments to the effect that Carnarvon Primary School is now a great and safe place to be".

The P&CA Committee of the School provided one of the strongest testimonies for the positive change the school climate experienced in 1993. They considered it a worthy cause, in their words, "to nominate our School Principal Len Christie for the Carnarvon Rotary 'Pride of Workmanship' Award". In stating the grounds for the nomination, the Committee was unequivocal in their acknowledgment of the change:

> For too long a small minority of the students have not conformed to acceptable standards of behaviour. With the full support of the staff and parents Len has devised an excellent "Managing Student Behaviour" programme that has had an extremely positive effect on the number of suspensions...This is a major achievement in a school that draws its population from a diverse span of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds...Len has had to continually support the teachers' endeavours to reclaim the school from those who had an anti-social agenda, to achieve the outstanding results...[It is a] widely held view that the school has now become a happy and harmonious learning environment.

Needless to say, this nomination won the Award, clearly signifying an important recognition in the community for the changes in the school climate. A parent had this to say in an interview: "the change this year is enormous; the school is a happy place and the kids are happy to come along. Playgrounds used to be full of yelling and screaming by teachers trying to maintain order, now you have warm and positive relationships".

Within the school community, the gardeners, cleaners, teaching and support staff, and students that were interviewed confirmed the positive changes and some of their words are: "I don't think we can see the same amount of improvement as it has been in the last 10 months...It's not so bad now that

you could have such improvement again"; "students are a lot more respectful...litter has been controlled greatly because kids eat in designated areas, graffitti in toilets has reduced drastically. Students are not so much in aggression against each other, they are a happy mob now"; "this year has been really quiet, we [students] are growing up now. We have to get our acts together if we want to go places like camps. After all my interclass withdrawals I had to stop and think, it was close to camp. I am now a good girl".

Towards the end of Term 3, 1993, a survey of about 60 per cent of the staff by the District Office regarding the implementation of the discipline policy provides further empirical evidence for the perceived association between the introduction of the policy and the positive change to the school climate in 1993. More than 80 per cent of the respondents believed that a clear cut discipline policy has led to a reduction in disruptive and violent discipline problems during 1993; they have seen the greatest change in the happiness of the students; and they saw 'following the policy' as something positively different compared to 1992. They indicated feeling safer and finding it easier to teach - these being among the main purposes for which the Discipline Policy was introduced in 1993.

Rule breaking

Curious about these reported changes, the author turned attention to another crucial front, namely the conformity with school rules. An analysis of the documented rule breaking in CPS for the year 1993 revealed interesting patterns and will be reported here.

As at 23 November, 1993, 964 offences against the school rules were recorded for which 50 suspensions were made. But bare statistics on recorded offences hardly tell the whole story about increase or decrease in 'criminal activity'. The scope of unacceptable behaviours in the regulatory policy, the existence of a clear cut enforcement procedure, and the enthusiasm, vigilance or discretion of those operating the policy, are some of the factors that affect changes in offence figures.

The offences recorded in 1993 cover a vast array of 'behaviour areas' (29 in all) and they include the generally disruptive behaviours and the more serious unacceptable ones such as hitting or assaulting children and teachers, sexual molestation, and misuse or damage to property. Using the first term records as the baseline data, the patterns in offending that the 1993 records show are of significant interest to the task of ascertaining the impact of the current discipline policy from its inception in February 1993.

In broad terms, the offences fall into two categories, namely, the 'disruptive' and the 'violent'. The disruptive category comprises mostly what in criminological terms are called status offences (ie offences attributable to children's age and level of reasoning). On the other hand there are those offences which are of such magnitude that if committed by adults or outside the school environment could attract criminal prosecution and most of this category is violent in nature and victim-oriented.

As Table 1 shows, both categories of offences decreased from Term 1 to Term 4. The incidents of Terms 2 and 3 are over 200% (on average) lower than the recorded incidents of Term 1.

Table 1: Offence-types (reasons for suspension) at Carnarvon Primary School by Terms, 1993

	Term1	Term2	Term3	Term 4#	TOTAL
	No	No	No	No	
Disruptive Behaviour	349	101	121	63	634
Violent Behaviour	209	66	32	23	330
TOTAL	558	167	153	86	964

#As at 23 November 1993

It would seem that Term 1 was business as usual for those students who had grown accustomed to the 'unstructured' and largely unwritten discipline regimes of the previous years. Where previously misbehaviours, serious as they may be, might have been overlooked or verbally reprimanded, the 1993 discipline regime demanded that they be recorded and followed with logical consequences. Students that persisted with such misbehaviours ran the risk of being suspended at some stage within the overall framework of the policy. It would seem also that from Term 2 onwards this message had got to the students as, significantly, the pattern of the disruptive and violent components of school offences began to show a drastic fall from then on. Figures 4 and 5 below are graphic representations of these changes. The decline in the violent component was more gentle and smooth than that of the disruptive category.

Figure 4: Disruptive and violent categories of suspension offences, 1993

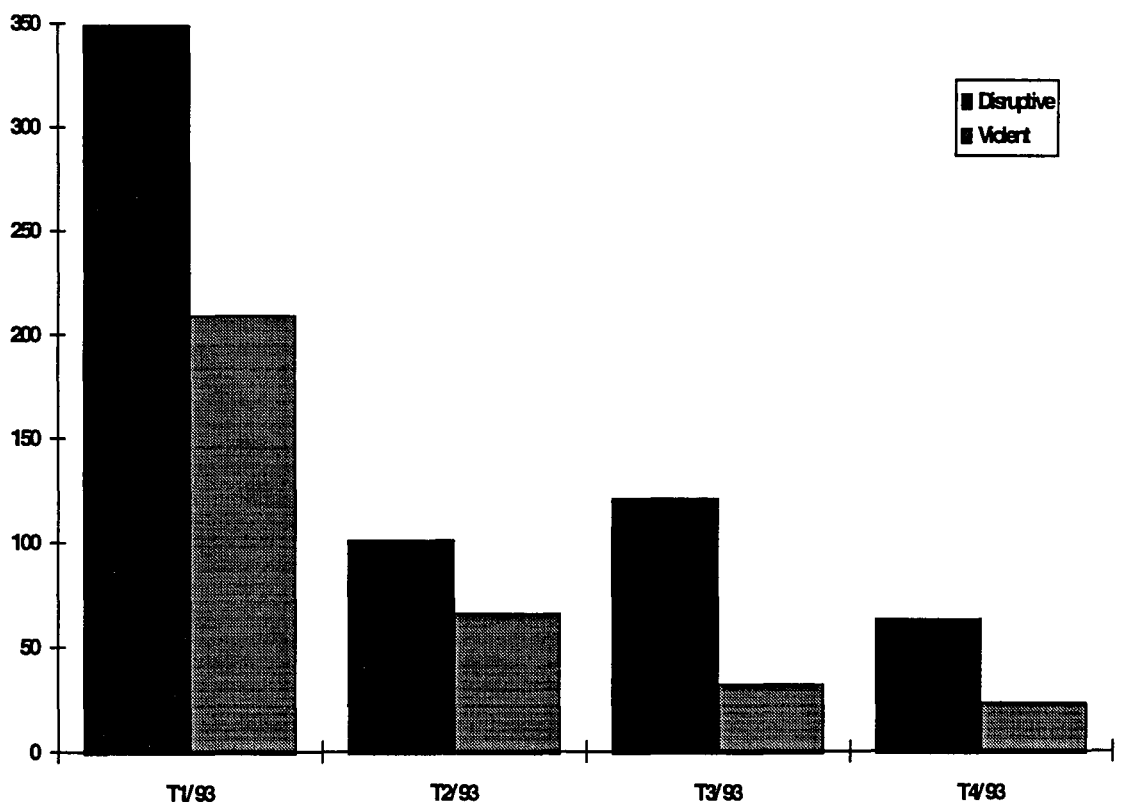
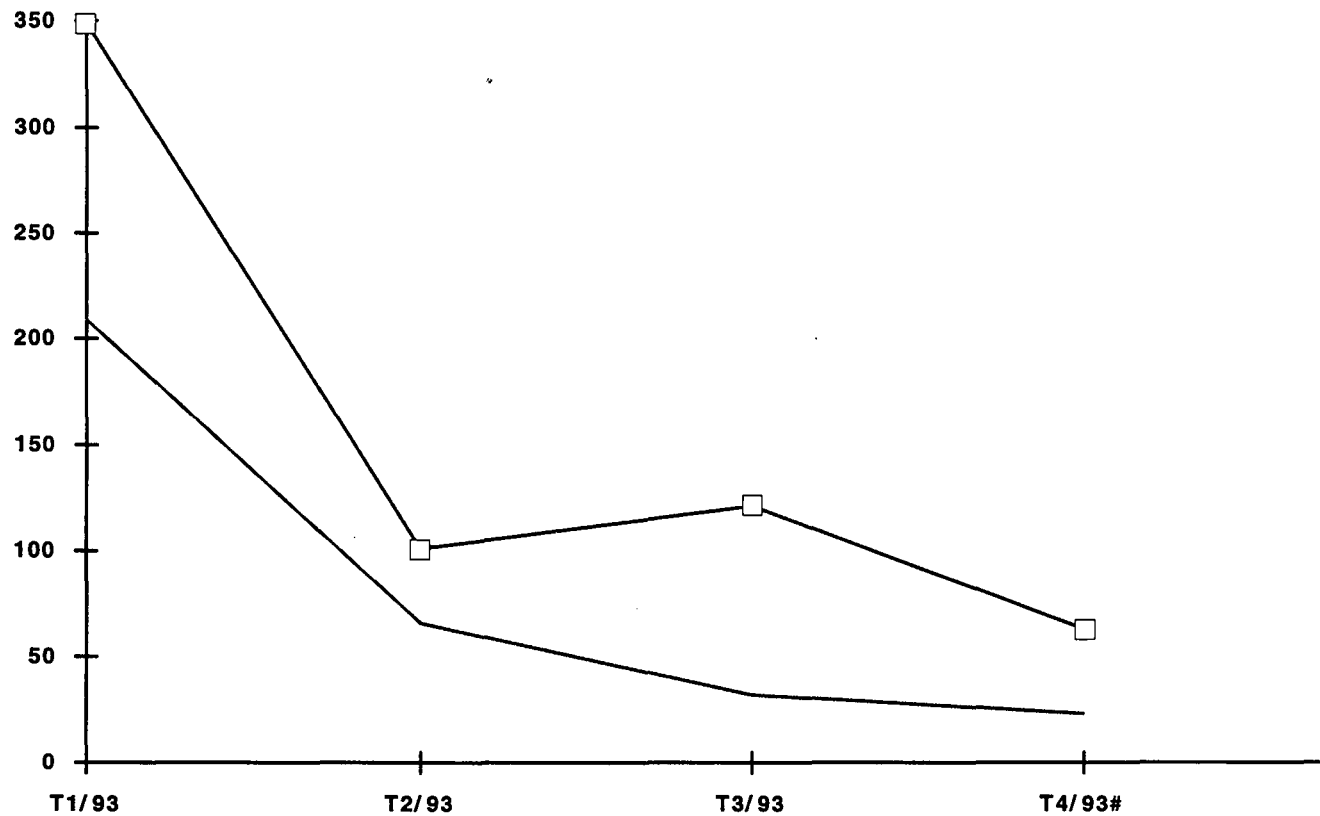


Figure 5: A line chart of disruptive and violent categories of suspension offences, 1993



#As at 23 November, 1993

While the reason for the observed changes may never be completely ascertainable, it is remarkable that by the end of 1993, the recorded incidence of disruptive and violent unacceptable behaviours, especially the violent category, was about 80 per cent less than the amount recorded in Term 1 of that year. Some respondents guessed that the behaviour problem

had reduced by 90 - 95 per cent of the incidents in Term 1; their 'guesstimates' were not very far from the empirical findings reported here.

Useful as percentage variations may be, they hardly provide a valid measure of the change in the actual level of offending. Changes in incidents relative to the populations of the target group show a more satisfactory trend, holding other factors constant. Table 2 shows this population-related analysis of the suspension offences in 1993.

Table 2: Rates of suspension offences by Terms and Types, 1993

	Stud pop.	Tot. susp. offences	Rate per 100	Disrupt categ.	Rate per 100	Viol categ.	Rate per 100
T1		558	172.8	349	108.0	209	64.7
T2	318	167	52.5	101	31.8	66	20.8
T3	308	153	49.7	121	39.3	32	10.4
T4#	305	86	28.2	63	20.7	23	7.5

#As at 23 November. 1993

The big difference between the rates for Term 1 on the one hand and Terms 2-4 on the other confirm the remarkable fall in both categories, and this is more glaring in the violent category where the rate for Term 4 is about 8 times less than that of Term 1. For the disruptive category, the ratio is 1:5.

Hierarchy of offences

What types of school offences occurred most frequently in the period under review? How serious are these offences? To answer these questions, a hierarchy of top five offences (in terms of frequency) in both categories was constructed as shown in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3: Top five suspension offences (disruptive), 1993

	Term1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4#
1st	Blatant disobed (229)	Blatant disobed. (84)	Blatant disobed (91)	Blatant disobed (45)
2nd	Leaving class wop* (34)	Leaving class wop (7)	Breaking MSB rules (9)	Leaving class wop (7)
3rd	Breaking MSB rules (28)	Running away from sch (5)	Leaving class wop (7)	Spitting; Break. MSB rules (4 each)
4th	Running away from sch (27)	Disrupting games (3)	Running away from sch (5)	-
5th	Playing out of corr area (16)	Playing out of corr area; Stealing (1 each)	Spitting (1)	-

*Wop (without permission)

#As at 23 November, 1993

Table 4: Top five suspension offences (violent), 1993

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4#
1st	Hitting other child. (67)	Swearing at teacher/ adult (16)	Misusing sch. property (8)	Fighting (7)
2nd	Swearing at teacher/ adult (31)	Swearing at teacher/ adult (16)	Hitting other child. (7)	Swearing at teacher/ adult; Hitting other child. (4 each)
3rd	Fighting (20)	Fighting (13)	Threaten to hit other child. (4)	-
4th	Throwing things at others (16)	Throwing things at others (6)	Swear in conver.; swea at teacher/ adult; playfight (3 each)	-
5th	Misusing sch. property (15)	Swearing at other child. (4)	Storming out class; Fighting; threaten to assault teacher (1 each)	-

As at November 23, 1993

In 1993, the offences that tended to predominate in the disruptive category were 'blatant disobedience', 'leaving classroom without permission', 'breaking of MSB rules', and 'running away from school'. Other offences that also ranked among the top five such as 'stealing', 'playing out of correct area' and 'spitting' appeared to be of less consequence, in frequency and dangerousness.

In the 'violent offence' category, 'hitting other children', 'swearing at teacher/adult', 'misuse of school property' and 'fighting' were predominant. 'Physical assault' (or threat of it) on teachers occurred only once in 1993. This was in great contrast to the previous years when, anecdotally, physical assault on teachers was rampant and vicious.

Victimisation

The 1993 data (see Table 5) suggest that the disruptive offences involving 'victims' were mainly 'property-oriented' such as throwing objects around the classroom, littering or throwing food, stealing and riding bicycle on school grounds. On the other hand, the violent offences were directed mainly at persons, eg hitting or threatening to hit teachers or children, fighting, and making obscene gestures. They were overwhelmingly aimed at fellow children. Those against property included vandalising school flowers and trees, and damaging the property of other students.

Table 5: Categories of suspension offences by victim-types, 1993

	Disruptive		Violent		TOTAL
	No	%*	No	%	
Property-related	11	22.0	39	78.0	50
Person-related	9	3.0	287	97.0	296
Others	614	99.4	4	0.6	618
TOTAL	634		330		964

*Percentages are based on row totals

It can be argued that 'blatant disobedience' can victimise teachers, but this is only insofar as teachers occupy authority positions and have to enforce the school rules. In other words, it is the office to which the disobedience is directed, even though the 'occupiers' of that office inevitably experience disruption in the discharge of their educational responsibilities. Needless to say other students would have their education disrupted as well and this, as shown in chapter two, to the displeasure of their parents.

Arguably also, most of the 'swearing at teacher' occurred in the context of teachers exercising the authority of their office or vocation. Compared to blatant disobedience, this form of misbehaviour is 'legislatively' considered (in the context of the policy) to be more harmful.

The gender of the human victims was not readily amenable to analysis at the time of the research. The conventional pattern has been that there are more

male victims and the offenders in such victimisation are males. No evidence from this research suggests that the CPS experience in 1993 deviated from this pattern.

Suspensions

The actual and proportional figures obtained from the records of the CPS suggested that suspensions decreased significantly over the four Terms of the year as Table 6 shows. Consistent with other studies elsewhere, suspension in that year was predominantly a male phenomenon (see Omaji, 1992, a study with an empirical focus on the Australian Capital Territory). Anecdotal information suggests that in Western Australia males account for about 80 per cent of suspensions in any one school Term. Although female population at the CPS was greater than the male population during the four Terms under review, the likelihood of female students being suspended was about 23.3 times lower than the males.

Table 6: Frequency, gender and rates of suspensions by Terms, 1993

	Stud pop	Susp	Rate per 100	Male stud pop.	Male stud susp	Rate per 100	Fem stud pop	Fem stud susp	Rate per 100
T1	323	22	6.8	150	21	14.0	173	1	0.6
T2	318	17	5.3	153	13	8.5	165	4	2.4
T3	308	7	2.3	141	6	4.3	167	1	0.6
T4 #	305	4	1.3	141	4	2.8	164	0	0.0

#As at 23 November, 1993

Recidivism

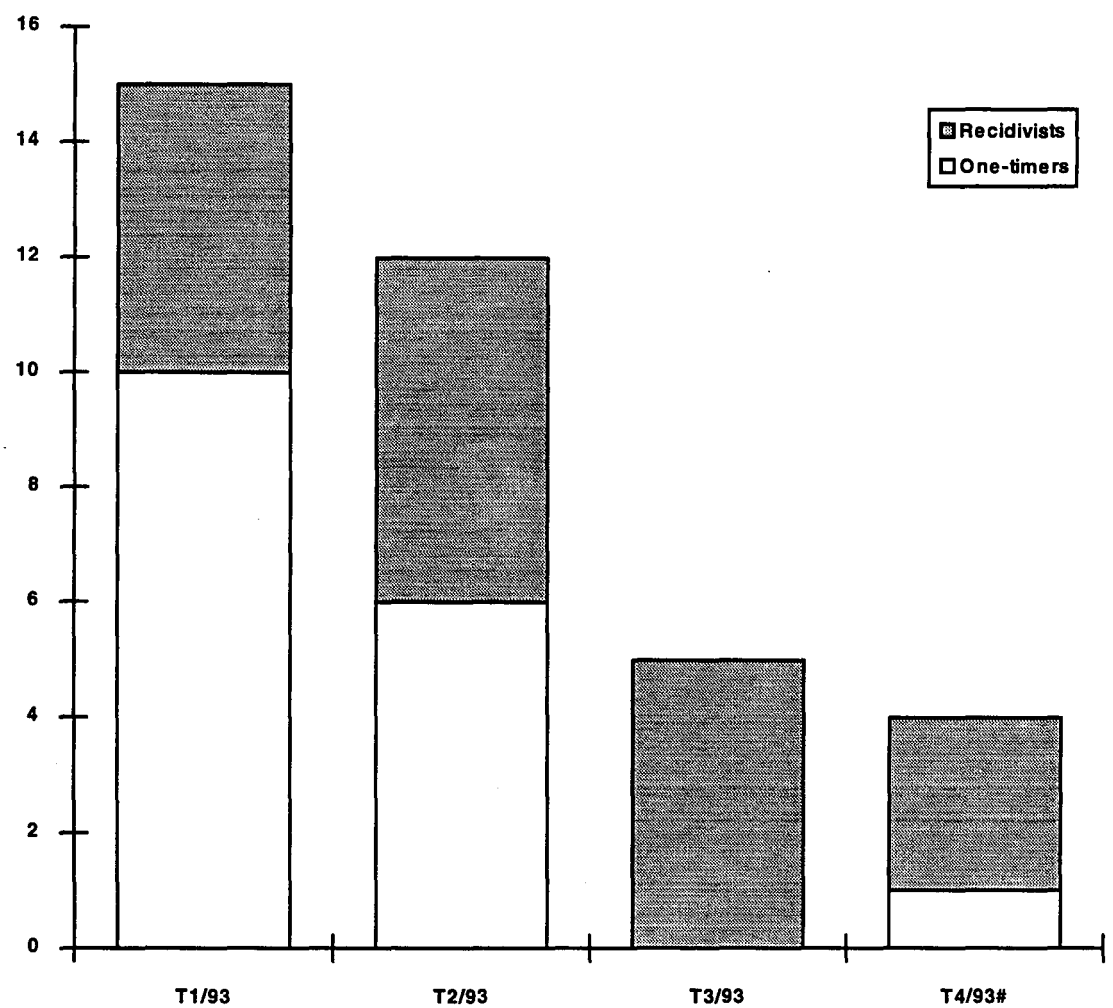
Recidivism accounted for most of the 50 suspensions in 1993. Although 23 students were involved in these suspensions, 10 were responsible for 74 per cent (37) of the suspensions, and as few as five students picked up 50 per cent of the total suspensions. Given a total recorded violations of school rules of 964, there were 19 offences for every one suspension and 42 for every one student suspended. Some respondents queried why any student would be allowed to amass such number of offences before being removed or the school's host community called in. Their argument basically was that 'by the time such a student reaches the suspension stage he or she is damaged' or 'has caused damage to other children'. The former query suggests that the policy was seen to give too much leeway to recalcitrant or incorrigible students. The latter expected the school to have called on relevant community agencies to intervene before too long. The strength of both queries can be contested, but the figures suggest clearly that the policy encouraged no haste in isolating students with behaviour problems from school or in seeking outside intervention.

The records of most of the students suspended are a litany of 'blatant disobedience', 'swearing at teacher' and 'hitting other children'. Of the 29 types of offences that the discipline policy covers, these three together were recorded 543 times in the year, accounting for 56.3 per cent of all the recorded offences that led to suspensions.

Another area where the performance of the policy appeared remarkable is in narrowing down the 'offender-market'. As Figure 6 shows, the number of

'one-timers' or new recruits into the 'deviant group' in each Term diminished significantly - down to zero in Term 3 - in 1993.

Figure 6: One-time offenders and recidivists among the students suspended, 1993 .



As at November 23, 1993

Ethnicity and suspension

Another important issue raised by some respondents is the ethnic background of those suspended. All 23 were of aboriginal descent and for

this reason, mainly, the policy was referred to as racist by a few of the parents whose children were affected. Some staff expressed concern about this allegation as well. Testimonial data (from interviews) showed that few respondents (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike) wanted the implementation of the policy modified in favour of any ethnic group, although there was a fairly widespread view that the nature of the social control that the policy embodies may be culturally different to the type many Aboriginal people use.

Ethnographic works have shown that the 'authoritative structure' of the mainstream school system is at odds with the Aboriginal client. For instance, 'leaving classroom without permission' which is considered unacceptable and disruptive may carry no message for Aboriginal children in the school other than exercising their accustomed independence or freedom. Kearins (1985, p40) observed that "most... Aboriginal children...are likely to be physically more agile and skilled, perhaps partly because of the greater freedom allowed in exploration and decision-making".

The significance of this issue must be appreciated in context. As shown in chapter one, Aboriginal students constituted about 42 per cent (132) of the total student population (314 on average) at the CPS in 1993. The twenty-three students suspended constituted about 17 per cent of the Aboriginal student population. The remaining 83 per cent probably breached the school rules but did not get to the suspension stage. Thus while 100 per cent 'aboriginality' of the students suspended suggests something more than an over-representation in the school's discipline regime, the '99 that have not

gone astray' should challenge the assumptions of all parties and call for further sociological analysis, bearing in mind some of the issues raised in the following.

The nature of the dominant offences - blatant disobedience and swearing at teachers in particular - that led to the 17 per cent being suspended raises a critical issue that could have a far-reaching or long-term implication for the continued success of discipline policies at Carnarvon and other communities with similar ethnic make-up. It calls for an investigation that focuses *inter alia* on questions such as: to what extent does the conception of offences in the school rules coincide with the value system of the Aboriginal segment of the school community? Could the most prevalent offences (ie 'blatant disobedience', 'hitting of other children' and 'swearing at teacher/adult') in actual fact be a language of resistance or opposition to the mainstream educational policy and practice? Lastly, what cultural sensitivity is required in order to effectively deal with the situation?

Answers to these questions could shed more light on the allegation of racism. The concern is to ensure that discipline policies do not give rise to what the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has called "setting the [Aboriginal] kids up for the penal system". Additionally, the investigation could advance the ongoing debate about the nature of Aboriginal education and social control that is capable of avoiding further alienation and criminalisation of the Aboriginal population.

The issues raised in the preceding paragraphs loom large, but they do not detract from the fact that the consistently drastic reduction in the number of

suspensions in 1993 gives cause for optimism and supports the view that the School's discipline policy was an achiever. The community has passed a judgment of success on the policy - a judgement supported by the radical and positive changes that the school environment and the rate of rule breaking witnessed in 1993 (the year of a structured discipline policy in the CPS history).

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Evaluating social programs can be a well drawn out process. The different evaluative methods ranging from the experimental through cost-analysis to the participatory modes makes an attempt to determine what method appropriate as time-consuming as applying that method to a particular research. However, within the constraints of time and material resources, this research has evaluated the discipline policy that CPS introduced at the beginning of 1993, in a 'quick and clean' manner, using the process evaluation method. An attempt was made to collect and analyse pertinent data in a way that can inform but not mislead the decision process of the school and its host community.

Through observation, documentary analysis, and interviews, data were generated in order to assess the development process, scope and suitability of the policy's objectives, how effective the policy was implemented, and what changes in the school climate could be associated with the policy. This chapter reflects further on some of the major themes that have emerged from the findings reported in the preceding chapters.

It is significant that the administration of the school under the leadership of Mr Len Christie chose to confront (using a rules- or policy- approach) rather than put up with the behaviour problems that the CPS was experiencing prior to 1993. This choice did at least two things: one, it challenged the seeming 'fatalism' of the previous regimes and, two, it put the administration

on a collision course with parents that were comfortable, complacent or indifferent to the disruption and violence in the school and with the students that were benefiting from the absence of any structured discipline programs. The philosophical disposition that shaped this choice may not be totally apparent but it suggests strongly that the protagonists believed in, or at least were committed to, the efficacy of discipline law or rules and the capacity of human beings to change when presented with such rules. Fuller's assertion in his *The Morality of Law*, 1963 captures this belief fairly well:

> to embark on the enterprise of subjecting human conduct to the governance of rules involves of necessity a commitment to the view that man is, or can be, become a responsible agent, capable of understanding and following rules and answerable for his defaults (p162).

Mr Christie and his staff were not just desirous to institute a structured system of discipline rules; they committed themselves to enforce the system along with a positive reinforcement project and were convinced that the students would modify their behaviours accordingly. The drop in the level of disruption and violence by the end of the first year following the intervention tends to vindicate that conviction.

So far as the evidence suggests, the success that was achieved did not result from any attempt "to enforce blind obedience" to the rules (see Carnarvon Primary School 1993, p2). The administration used to their maximum benefit the principles of logical consequences and taking responsibility for one's actions, notwithstanding, as shown earlier, that this approach might have lacked capacity to address what the community perceived to be the root causes of the problem. Nonetheless, by relying upon the 'logical

consequences' model, as opposed to a capricious 'command and control' model, they have stayed closely to Selznick's (1969) 'theory' that

> in a community that aspires to a higher order of legality, obedience to law is not submissive compliance. The obligation to obey the law is closely tied to the defensibility of the rules themselves and of the official decisions to enforce them (p17).

To ensure that their rules were suitable and defensible the administration adopted a systematic approach to introduce and publicise their policy. They adjudged the behaviour problems to be acute and requiring a more or less shock therapy, adopted a predictable system of social expectations and consequences, consulted extensively within and outside the school community to gain public acceptance and support for this discipline regime, enlisted the commitment of all the staff for implementing the system, and motivated students with positive rewards for acceptable behaviours.

Evidence suggests overwhelmingly that the administration achieved the objectives outlined in the discipline policy; and this to the great admiration of the staff and students of the school, the host community including the locally based state politicians, and the personnel that control the education program in the State. With the reclaim of the school from a state of 'living hell' that existed prior to 1993 and the setting up of a happy environment, the stress level of all the stakeholders decreased significantly. The school went quite far on the way to becoming the envy of Carnarvon.

This outstanding achievement raises, paradoxically, a question that is crucial to any process of developing, implementing and evaluating discipline policies and rules: to what extent were the root causes of the

discipline problem correctly assessed and addressed in the regulatory intervention? In the experience at the CPS, respondents unanimously held 'faulty parenting' as the cause of the misbehaviour in the school. The findings of this research have shown that the discipline policy did not focus on, and was, in its current structure and orientation, incapable of redressing, this cause. Nothing suggested to this author that this social malaise, which was quite evident in the community, had decreased in 1993. In other words, the state of parenting did not improve noticeably, if at all.

The reduction in misbehaviour despite continued 'faulty parenting' suggests, therefore, that the community misread or, at best partially understood, the real causes of the problem in their school. A close examination showed that to the extent that faulty parenting was involved, it was a remote factor compounded by a more significant set of immediate factors which made the problem to assume a frightening proportion. These factors included the constant change or transience of staff and the loose, unpredictable or conflictual social expectations. From all indication, both remote and immediate factors prevented from developing in the school the bonding and positive socialisation that greatly enhance effective personal development, interpersonal skills and capacity to conform to socially acceptable behaviour norms.

While transience of staff could not be controlled in 1993, the discipline policy removed to a large extent the unpredictability that dominated the previous years, by presenting a set of clear social expectations and by committing the staff to a structured reward system for students. This process encouraged some form of bonding and positive socialisation, and it is in

these basic elements - coupled with the quality leadership the Principal and his administrative team provided - that a strong explanation can be found for the extraordinary success of the CPS regulatory response to the discipline problem.

The stakeholders in the CPS would be eager to see the policy perform with similar success in the years that follow. Clearly, community acceptance will not be a problem. Further, the staff, students and parents who have tasted a positive school climate in 1993 would be careful not to jeopardise the gains from the policy. However, in order to build on the existing strengths of the policy, the following areas are highlighted for close attention. In broad terms, the school should:

1. mobilise resources to lift the achievement level of the students, especially those of the Aboriginal descent whose current level seems pathetic;

2. strive with powers that be, spiritual and temporal, in order to retain a critical mass of teachers (including principals) over a period that is much longer than the experience of the school has shown to date;

3. work in partnership with community organisations and projects to improve the conditions of families, including parental skills, which impinge directly on the well being of students both at home and in the school;

4. intensify campaigns through newsletters, community activities, and the local media to retain positive images in the community;

5. maintain an ongoing consultation with its internal and external communities in regard of the objectives and implementation of the discipline policy;

6. promote the 'social skills' orientation in the policy and involve students in enforcing the discipline rules.

7. arrange a regular evaluation of the policy as a way to check from time to time the weaknesses and strengths of the underlying principles and values against contemporary theory and practice, and to reinforce and publicise the commitment of staff to a good school;

8. ensure that the sanctions attached to the policy (eg time-out) are enforced in ways that guarantee minimum loss in education and retain respect for all concerned;

9. maintain a strong institutional support for staff development courses which give a substantive attention to social skills relevant to a multi-cultural setting; and

10. develop a functional sensitivity to the Aboriginal educational needs and social control systems.

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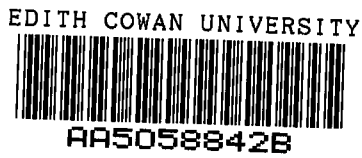

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